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AUTHOR Senese, Donald J.
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ABSTRACT

The decline in academic achievements among public school students during the past two decades is discussed and several studies that support the evidence on the lack of educational excellence are cited. It is noted that the results of these studies offer a message about Catholic education, since many of the proposals offered to rectify this problem have already been incorporated into the Catholic school. For example, a study funded by the Department of Education concluded that Catholic schools induce significantly higher achievement from comparable students than do public schools; this was attributed to greater amounts of homework, better student attendance, a superior disciplinary climate, and focus on an academic core curriculum with only a modest range of electives. It is also pointed out that a major strength of the Catholic high school has been its ability to obtain a higher level of academic achievement from students of low socioeconomic backgrounds than public schools. Several changes initiated by the U.S. Department of Education over the past few years to support private education are described, including a full time advisor to the Secretary of Education; monthly meetings with representatives from private schools to exchange views; funding of studies for extensive data collection on students being educated in non-public institutions; recognition of outstanding private schools; grant money for school districts with allocations to private schools; assistance for private schools in building their library collections; including private schools in school-based technology projects; and the support of tuition tax credits. (DJR)

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"Implications for Private Educators of Recent Studies on Education"

by
Dr. Donald J. Senese
Assistant Secretary for Educational
Research and Improvement
U.S. Education Department

Catholic Diocese of Arlington
Education Institute
Bishop Denis J. O'Connell High School
Arlington, Virginia

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

It is indeed a pleasure to join all of you here today at this Education Institute for the Catholic Diocese of Arlington.

I feel very much at home here as a Catholic, a resident of this diocese and an educator.

I want to pay tribute to all of you who are truly laboring in the vineyards making the numerous sacrifices to bring about quality and meaningful education for the children of this diocese.

The focus of this presentation is "Implications for Private Educators of Recent Studies on Education."

Allow me to begin with a few general comments. Today, I would like to focus on the nature of those reports, what we can extract from them for private education, and finally the role for private education in the whole education reform movement.

Let me make clear that I support our American system of public schools but I also support the existence of private schools. I believe that a society benefits in the field of education, similar in many other fields, where there is no monopoly and competition flourishes. Competition provides choice and that choice gives us options and should lead to an improved product. Competition gives the consumer a primary role and it should be no different in education. In schooling, the child and parent are the consumers, the teacher and school administrator, the producers. Our purpose as a society should not be a limited goal of preserving public education or guaranteeing its monopoly status. It should be to guarantee that the best possible education is provided in a society to all its members with a range of choices where the consumer is paramount. A good strong public school system along with a good strong private school system benefits all.

If we had to categorize the year of 1983 in education, we could term it the year of the reports.

Reports on the condition of education are not new. One scholar recently noted that since about 1890, almost every ten years some new report has been issued on the condition of American education.

Some of these reports have made a big splash upon release while others were barely noted by educators and the news media and were quietly put on a shelf to gather dust.

Are the current risk of reports going to be any different? The answer is "maybe yes" and "maybe no" but I tend to weigh more on the side of "maybe yes."

The first and most striking report attracting public attention came from the U.S. Education Department, a report of an 18 member National Commission on Excellence in Education entitled A Nation at Risk.

The title itself had a shock value; it conveyed the idea that something was not right, that a danger lurked before us, that a grave crisis was upon us.

The Commission report had been produced by 18 individuals of diverse background and educational philosophy. These individuals had been appointed by the Secretary of Education, T.H. Bell, to do a comprehensive study of American education and report back within 18 months. The report was a concise 36 page document well written but with a powerful and disturbing message.

The report A Nation at Risk talked about the following issues:

(1) the educational foundations of American society were being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatened our very future as a nation and a people.

(2) The once unchallenged pre-eminence of the United States in commerce, industry, science and technological innovation is being taken over by competitors throughout the world.

(3) That although the average citizen presently is better educated and more knowledgeable than the average citizen of a generation ago, the average graduate of our schools and colleges today is not as well educated as the average graduate of 25 or 35 years when a much small part of our population completed high school and college.

(4) While each generation of Americans had outstripped its parents in education, literacy and economic attainment, we may be facing for the first time in our history the fact that educational skills of one generation will not surpass--and many not even equal or approach those of its parents.

(5) That the goal of a life-long Learning Society in a rapidly changing technologically-oriented world needed to replace our present philosophy in education--a philosophy permeating our society of doing the minimum work for the moment and then coasting throughout life on what we have learned in the first quarter.

This report hit the American people, and even the educational community, like a firebell in the night--awakening them to a serious and real danger.

In effect, we had offered our students--and are offering our students--a cafeteria of courses--heavy on desserts but little of meat and potatoes, the trivial over the substantial.

With the release of that report in April 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence, educational excellence has become a major topic of public concern. And since the release of that report, America has been virtually

inundated by other reports on the quality of education, such as: Academic Preparation for College, developed by The College Board; Action for Excellence, coordinated by the Education Commission of the States, a report of its National Task Force for Economic Growth; America's Competitive Challenge: The Need for a National Response, produced by the Task Force of Business-Higher Education Forum; Making the Grade, sponsored by the Twentieth Century Fund; a report by the National Science Board Commission on Precollege Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology; National Science Board Commission report to improve the nation's elementary and secondary math and science education; "A Study of Schooling" by John Goodlad; The Carnegie Report on high schools; the Sizer study on schools; and Mortimer Adler's The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto.

If 1983 represented the year of reports, then 1984 represented a year of action to correct the problems in the U.S. educational system.

By the spring of 1984 a poll in Newsweek magazine revealed that voters considered the "quality of education" to be the second most important issue facing the country--just behind unemployment.

On the first anniversary of the report of A Nation at Risk, the Secretary of Education released a report entitled A Nation Responds documenting the positive reactions by States, associations, professional groups to turn the educational system back toward excellence and achievement. The Secretary of Education noted that a "rising tide of mediocrity" had been replaced by a "tidal wave of reform." The action has been so swift in so many areas that the report was out of date monitoring

action almost the day it was issued. A Nation at Risk and the other reports give us hope that these will make a difference because of the positive reaction of States through actions of the governors, state legislators, and education agencies to strengthen education, upgrade requirements for graduation, require greater effort by students, attract more qualified teachers and promote educational awareness among public officials, businesses (the private sector) and parents.

To use a popular phrase, we were "missing the boat" as far as academic requirements. Years of social promotion, grade inflation, diluted courses, replacement of solid academic subjects with so-called life style courses, a concentration on the claims of equity over those of excellence, and a push for minimum competency rather than maximum achievement finally was taking its toll. Education was looked upon as a destination, not as a journey and thus the quickest and easiest way you got there was what mattered.

This is what I found shocking and I believe it is related to the very heart of the question of what all of those in private education can learn from the reports.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education noted in A Nation at Risk that "secondary school curricula had been homogenized, diluted and diffused."

A strong recommendation was made for Five New Basics as the minimum for the achievement for a high school diploma. These included the following curriculum during four years of high school: 4 years of English; 3 years of mathematics; 3 years of science; 3 years of social studies; and one half year of computer science. In addition, college bound students should take two years of a foreign language.

The National Center for Education Statistics is one of the components of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

The National Center conducted a longitudinal study of high school students--a nationally representative sample of the sophomores of 1980 who graduated in 1982. In examining the transcripts of 12,000 students to ascertain the extent to which these high school graduates met the National Commission's criteria of the Five Basics (and these Five Basics are recommended minimum requirements), the National Center for Education Statistics found that less than two percent of high school graduates met these full set of requirements including the foreign language recommended by the National Commission. Think about that for a moment--less than two percent of a representative sample of high school graduates met these recommended minimum requirements.

What may be even more shocking is how these requirements were met. I mentioned a moment ago, and the Commission focused on, the dilution of high school courses. The math of ten or twenty years ago was algebra, geometry, trigonometry; today it may include "business math" or "consumer math." The English courses of ten or twenty years ago may have included Shakespeare, the Romantic Poets or Renaissance literature; today it may be an advanced remedial course or a batch of the latest current fad novels. How far we have fallen!

What do these reports focus on? In short, these reports concentrate on the significant decline in academic achievement of students during the past two decades and offer proposals for the rectification of this problem. Of course, the discovery of the decline in student achievement is nothing new.

It has been pointed out by such critics of American education as Paul Copperman (The Literacy Hoax) and Frank Armbruster (Our Children's Crippled Future) for at least the past decade. It is only now, however, that the American education establishment has come to fully acknowledge this decline in academic achievement. Moreover, the adverse impact of this academic decline on the American economy has only now been realized by the American business community and the public at large. For these recent reports stress that the academic decline is a significant factor in the slippage in America's economic condition and will inhibit the country's transition to a high technology economy that most analysts see as vital for prosperity in the future.

How does this concern for the deterioration of student achievement relate to Catholic education? It must be pointed out that the recent reports focus solely on the public schools. But these analyses of the weaknesses in the public schools and their suggestions for reform offer a message about Catholic education. For there is evidence that some of the most significant reforms proposed by these reports are already incorporated into the standard Catholic education.

During the past two decades when the achievement test scores of students have been dropping, the achievement test scores of Catholic students from Catholic schools have been significantly better than those of public school students. It has been argued that it is the Catholic schools' selection of students rather than the quality of the Catholic school itself that accounts for this superiority. However, a study completed in 1981 directed by the noted educational researcher James S. Coleman, entitled Public and Private Schools, which was funded by the Department of

Education, addressed this question as to whether Catholic schools provide a superior education and concluded that they do. In short, the Coleman study revealed that Catholic schools induce significantly higher achievement from comparable students than do public schools.

The Coleman study attributed this superior academic achievement to three distinctive factors in Catholic schooling:

(1) Greater amounts of homework.

(2) Better student attendance.

(3) Superior disciplinary climate.

According to Coleman, those public schools that equalled Catholic ones in these particular areas were able to induce equal levels of achievement from their students.

The importance of these three factors have been stressed by the various education reports. For example, Recommendation #5 of Action for Excellence by the Task Force on Education for Economic Growth of the Education Commission of the States calls for the establishment of "firm, explicit, and demanding requirements concerning discipline, attendance, homework, grades, and other essentials of effective schooling." According to A Nation at Risk: "Students in high schools should be assigned far more homework than is now the case." And The Paideia Proposal holds that "Students must be required to behave in class and in school in a manner that is conducive to learning" (p. 55).

In addition to these three factors, one more should be added: Catholic high school students focus on an academic core curriculum with only a modest range of electives. Catholic high schools have not offered what the Commission on Excellence in Education refers to as the "smorgasbord" of electives that have subverted traditional academic standards.

Thus, most of the proposals for academic reform call for the concentration on academic basics. For example, The College Board's study, Academic Preparation for College, refers to the Basic Academic Subjects--the arts, mathematics, science, social studies, a foreign language--that are necessary for effective work in college. The Commission on Excellence in Education uses the term the Five New Basics--English, mathematics, science, social studies and computer science.

Finally, it should be noted that the various reports see no obstacle in pursuing both equity and excellence. As the Commission on Excellence in Education asserts: "the twin goals of equity and high-quality schooling have profound and practical meaning for our economy and society, and we cannot permit one to yield to the other in principle or practice." Similarly, the very essence of Mortimer Adler's Paideia Proposal is that the same quality of schooling should be provided for all.

Dr. Adler puts this issue in a very interesting perspective. Writing in The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto, he observes:

> But the democratic promise of equal educational opportunity, half fulfilled, is worse than a promise broken. It is an ideal betrayed. Equality of opportunity is not, in fact, provided if it means no more than taking all children into the public schools for the same number of hours, days, and years. If once they are divided into the sheep and the goats, into those destined for economic and political leadership and for a quality of life to which all should have access, then the democratic purpose has been undermined by an inadequate system of public schooling.
>
> It fails because it has achieved only the same quantity of public schooling, not the same quality. This failure is a downright violation of democratic principles.

One does not have to agree with all of Dr. Adler's philosophy on education or the specifics of the Paideia Proposal to realize that he makes an important point. As the Coleman study pointed out, one of the major

strengths of the Catholic high schools has been their ability to induce academic achievement from students of low socio-economic backgrounds. In fact, the effects on individuals from these backgrounds is greater than those on students of more affluent families.

Yet, we do have a crisis in our public schools--and it could be even deeper than the academic crisis. The crisis may be summed up as a lack of goals, direction or visions.

A study which will be available soon talk of the public school today similar to a huge shopping mall. One can go through and find a variety of things but no judgement on worth or value. The gourmet shop is just as available as the hot dog stand in the shopping mall, and without any distinction of a hierarchy of values. The student is the customer shopping without guidance.

This concept has led in too many of our schools to a so-called "treaty of mediocrity". Essentially, the teachers and students say to each other--if you leave me alone, I won't bother you. Teachers will not impose homework or challenge students if the students will not disrupt classes. The student glides through until he or she receives a diploma.

A core question which our nation must wrestle with is the "why" of education.

That great philosopher of liberty and social development John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) in his famous essay On Liberty gave us this perceptive insight:

> All that has been said of the importance of the individuality of character, and diversity in opinions and modes of conduct, involves, as of the same unspeakable importance, diversity of education. A general State education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another; and as the mould in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government whether this be a monarch, a priesthood, an aristocracy or the majority of the existing generation.

While we may learn from these reports the importance of academic excellence, discipline, homework, a set core curriculum, you must not allow yourself, as private educators, to abandon your most important contribution to the educational process-diversity. In the process of learning from the public schools, you must resist the tendency to become exactly like them.

If the wisdom of John Stuart Mill is too passe for you, then consider the analysis of Nobel Prize economist Milton Friedman in his book Free to Choose: A Personal Statement. He calls our attention to the growing trend in our society of the centralization of the schools, an increase in the power of school administrators, and a reduction in the power of parents to make their own choices on education (pp. 152, 157); and Author Peter Brimelow ("What to Do About America's Schools.") in Fortune magazine (September 19, 1983) reminds us that the current drive for school reform may fail unless it gets at the systematic cause of U.S. education's inefficiency which he identifies as the monopoly of the education system.

The great support for prayer in public schools, the growth of fundamentalist schools, the increase interest in tuition tax credit and voucher plans, the courses being introduced to stress character education or "responsibility" in public schools, and the growing concern over student behavior and orderly classrooms are clear signs for a clearly defined need for goals and objectives for public schools.

As all of you learn from these reports and what you may gain from public schools, we in the U.S. Education Department are anxious to learn more about private schools. This has been a tremendous change from three and a half years ago when I first came to the U.S. Education Department. The view then seemed prevalent that the U.S. Education Department represented an entity to support and advocate public education only.

Let me mention just the highlights of some of those changes.

(1) The Secretary of Education has a full time advisor on non-public schools and monthly representatives of private schools gather in the department for a "Koffee Klatch" to exchange views;

(2) I mentioned earlier the Coleman study which was underway and completed when I joined the Education Department. We are still getting important data from that study;

(3) Our National Center for Education Statistics gathered important data on public school students for years but little was done on the private schools. We have remedied this deficiency so we can find out about that critical ten percent of students who are educated in non-public institutions. We have initiated a private school survey--one of the most comprehensive to gather data. What do we know so far?

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

- There are 27,600 private schools in the United States that enroll 5.7 million students and have almost 400,000 teachers.
- The schools compare with 24,750 in 1980 -- an increase of 2,850 schools (or 12%).
- The enrollments are up almost 400,000 (or 7%) compared with 1980.
- Catholic school enrollment is continuing to decline as a proportion of total enrollment as it has since the early 1960's. Fifty-six percent of the private school students are in Catholic schools; another 24% are in schools that classify themselves as non-Catholic religious affiliated and 20% are in unaffiliated schools.
- The NCES estimates that expenditures in these schools total $11.5 billion this year.

This private school survey has been completed and from the data collected, a total of seven reports will be issued the later part of this year or the early part of next year. These reports will concern the following issues: private schools in the U.S. by number and enrollment; selected characteristics of private school teachers; program funding in private schools; selected characteristics of private schools; meeting pupil needs in private schools; characteristics of private schools; minority enrollment in private schools.

(4) The School Finance Project, which was concluded under the guidance of my office (the Office of Educational Research and Improvement) did a separate chapter focusing on "Private Elementary and Secondary Education." This very useful chapter included a status report on the private school sector at the beginning of the 1980s, current federal and state relationships with private schools, a household survey on parental choice of public and private schools and the experience of aid for private schools abroad (notably British Columbia, Australia, and the Netherlands).

(5) We have initiated a recognition of outstanding secondary schools with a special program recognizing outstanding private secondary schools.

(6) One of the most successful of the President's initiatives has been the block grant proposal which consolidated almost thirty federal programs into a block grant to the States under the Educational Consolidation and Improvement Act, Chapter II. This act took effect in July of 1982. States receive the money from this act. School districts can use this money for a wide variety of services and must use some of the money to provide services and equipment to private schools although private schools can't receive the money directly.

Let me mention this very interesting fact. In a survey of this block grant money, the American Association of School Administrators noted that Chapter 2 block grant money is flowing relatively freely to private schools with districts spending an average of 15.6 percent of block grant money on private schools. (The percentage varied from a low of 3.9 percent to a high of 29.1 percent, AASA report "Private School Participation in ECIA Chapter 2.")

(7) Within OERI, I remain committed to a strong focus on private education. The National Center for Education Statistics is collecting regular information on private schools. The National Institute of Education is doing a study on the Minnesota tuition tax credit proposal for its significance on a national basis and our Center for Libraries and Educational Improvement provides exemplary program services to private schools (through the National Diffusion Network), assist the library collections of private colleges and universities, and, most recently, included private schools in one of our school-based technology projects (Houston).

(8) The President has been a strong advocate of choice in education particularly through tuition tax credits.

All of this is not to deny that Catholic schools do not share to some extent in the problems existing in the public schools and Catholic schools may even have certain particular problems of their own. For example, Catholic schools have a high turnover rate in teachers, probably because of lower pay. This turnover may weaken the ability of Catholic schools to build the sense of community and common purpose that has been a hallmark in Catholic education.

Recognizing that Catholic schools fall short of perfection does not detract from the fact that they are strong in qualities which have recently been proclaimed as vital for a quality education. This underscores the need for tuition tax credits to help parents defray the cost of this schooling.

This concern for excellence, in fact, provides a fundamentally different argument for tuition tax credits. In recent years, the usual argument for tuition tax credits has revolved around the concept of parental rights; that parents have the right to determine their children's education. This is a perfectly valid argument, but now it can be added that tuition tax credits would advance the overall national good.

For all the reports on education have contended that the declining academic achievement of students is detrimental to the social and economic well-being of the United States. Educational excellence has been put forth as a national goal that might entail increased national expenditures. That Catholic schools induce higher academic achievement for their students thus is a benefit to the country as a whole, not solely to the students and parents directly involved with the Catholic schools. Thus, it would seem appropriate that the federal government act to encourage, rather than retard, the use of these schools by its citizenry.

And we certainly have an eloquent statement of the service private schools provide to society in Justice William Rehnquist's words in the Supreme Court case upholding the constitutionality of the Minnesota tuition tax credit plan. Justice Rehnquist observed (Van D. Mueller and June Noyes, Petitioners v. Clyde E. Allen, Jr. et al, June 29, 1983):

> A state's decision to defray the cost of educational expenses incurred by parents--regardless of the type of schools their children attend--evidences a purpose that is both secular and understandable. An educated populace is essential to the

> political and economic health of any community, and a state's efforts to assist parents in meeting the rising cost of educational expenses plainly serves this secular purpose of ensuring that the state's citizenry is well-educated. Similarly, Minnesota, like other states, could conclude that there is a strong public interest in assuring the continued financial health of private schools, both sectarian and non-sectarian. By educating a substantial number of students such schools relieve public schools of a correspondingly great burden--to the benefit of all taxpayers. In addition, private schools may serve as a benchmark for public schools, in a manner analogous to the "TVA yardstick" for private power companies.

Overall, there is much to learn from the reports--and a continuing dialogue should be maintained between the public and private school sectors.

These education reports beginning with A Nation at Risk and the others assist us toward a reassessment of not only our goals but the very purpose of education. These reports should be a source not just of satisfaction but one of renewal for private education.

The question of building character, self-discipline, academic content, and a focus in life is implicit in all these reports on education reform, stated more forcefully in some rather than others. While you learn from those reports, keep in mind your unique distinction as one engaged in the field of private education and do not abandon that distinction--a vision of the spiritual nature of the individual.

C. S. Lewis reminds us in The Abolition of Man that a great many who debunk traditional or sentimental values have their background values of their own which they believe are immune from the debunking process.

What is that great difference between public and private education? The difference of opinions on education can be described as the difference between Pythagoras and Protagorus. Pythagorus held that truth was eternal, objective truth, while Protagorus held that man himself is the measure of all

things, thus Truth is subjective and ultimately a matter of individual opinion. The philosophy one accepts determines the type of education he or she will advocate.

Let's call to mind a quote from that greater author and scholar Christopher Dawson who found our Western world sick because we had cut ourselves off from our spiritual roots. He viewed our society as a purely secular and technological order afloat in a moral vacuum and stressed that the instrument for the 20th century renaissance was the school. Those of you in private can appreciate what Christopher Dawson was discussing.

In his work The Crisis of Western Education, Dawson writes:

> In the modern world the average man can go through his whole education without becoming aware of the existence of this elementary and essential spiritual factor either in the individual psyche or in the life of civilization. Whether he studies the liberal arts or science or technology, he is given no inkling of the existence of any higher principle which can be known and which can influence individual behavior or social culture. Yet, as I have said, all the great historic civilizations of the past recognized the existence of some spiritual principles or ends of this kind and made them the key of their interpretation of reality and their concepts of moral order. Hence a system of education like that of the modern secular state which almost totally ignores the spiritual component in human culture and in the human psyche is a blunder so enormous that no advance in scientific method or educational technique is sufficient to compensate for it. In this respect, we are inferior to many far less advanced cultures which have retained their consciousness of a spiritual order, for wherever this consciousness exists the culture still possesses a principle of integration.

Thanks for your attention. It has been a pleasure to be here with you.